



"The Debutante"

by Leonora Carrington

When I was a debutante I often used to go to the Zoological Gardens. I'd go there so often I knew the animals better than the young ladies of my own age. It was in fact to get away from people that I found myself everyday at the Zoo. The animal I knew the best was a young hyena. She knew me, too; she was very intelligent; I taught her French and in return she taught me her language. We spent many a pleasant hour this way.

On the first day of May, my mother was arranging a ball in my honor; for nights on end I suffered; I've always hated balls, especially those given in my honor.

On the morning of the First of May 1934, very early, I paid the hyena a visit. "It's a dammed nuisance," I told her, "I have to go to my ball this evening."

"You're lucky," she said, "I'd be glad to go. I don't know how to dance, but I know how to make conversation, anyway."

"There'll be lots of things to eat," I said. "I've seen trucks full of food coming up to the house."

"And you complain," relied the hyena, in disgust. "I eat once a day, and you should see the stuff they give me!"

I had a daring idea, I almost laughed: "Why don't you go in my place?"

"We don't look enough alike, otherwise I'd go all right," said the hyena, a bit sad.

"Listen," said I, "under the evening lights it isn't too easy to see; if you're dressed up a bit, among the crowd they won't notice. Then again, we're about the same height. You are my only friend, I beg of you." She thought things over, I knew she wanted to accept.

"Consider it done," she said suddenly.

It was very early in the day, there were not many keepers about. Quickly I opened the cage and in a few moments we were in the street. I took a taxi, and at home everyone was in bed. In my room I took out the dress I was to wear that evening. It was a little long and the hyena had trouble walking on the high heels of my shoes. I found some gloves to disguise her hands, too hair to resemble mine. When the sun reached my room she walked several times up and down, more or less upright. We were so busy that my mother, who was coming to say good morning to me, almost opened the door before the hyena had hidden under my bed. "There's a nasty smell in your room," said my mother, opening a window. "Before tonight you'll take a bath scented with my new salts." - "All right," I said. She didn't stay long. I think the smell was too strong for her.

"Don't be late for breakfast," said my mother, leaving my room.

The biggest problem was finding a disguise for her face. Hours and hours we tried; she turned down all of my suggestions. At last she said: "I think I know a solution. Do you have a maid?"

"Yes," I said, perplexed.

"Well, there you are. You'll ring for the maid and when she comes in we'll pounce on her and we'll tear her face off. I'll wear her face this evening in place of my own."

"That's not sensible," I said. "She'll probably be dead when she has no face left; someone will surely find the body and we'll go to prison."

"I'm hungry enough to eat her," replied the hyena.

"And what about the bones?"

"Them, too," she said. "Well, do you agree?"

"Only if you promise to kill her before tearing her face off; it'll hurt too much otherwise."

"Right, it's all the same to me."

I was ringing for Mary the maid, somewhat nervous. I wouldn't have done so if I didn't hate balls so. When Mary came in I turned to the wall so as not to see. I admit it was over quick. A short cry and that was the end. While the hyena was eating, I looked out of the window. A few minutes later she said: "I can't eat any more; both of the feet are still left, but if you have a bag I'll eat them later in the day."

"You'll find in the closet a bag embroidered with the fleur de lys. Empty out the handkerchiefs in there and take that one." She was doing as I had told her. The she said: "Turn around now and look how beautiful I am!"

In front of the mirror the hyena was admiring herself in Mary's face. She had eaten carefully all around the face so that just what she needed was left. "Yes indeed, you've made a good job of it," I said. Towards evening, when the hyena was all dressed, she announced: "I feel in fine form. I've the impression I'll be a big success tonight."

When we had heard the music downstairs for some time, I said to her: "Go on, now, and remember not to stand next to my mother: she'd know it wasn't me, for sure. Apart from her, I know nobody. Good luck." I kissed her as she left but she did have a strong smell. Night had come. Tired out by the emotions of the day, I took a book and, near the open window, I gave myself over to rest. I remember I was reading Gulliver's

Travels by Jonathan Swift. It was perhaps an hour after that the first sign of something untoward came. A bat entered by the window, uttering little cries. I'm terribly afraid of bats. I hid behind a chair, my teeth chattering. I was hardly on my knees when the sound of beating wings was drowned out by a loud noise at my door. My mother came in, pale with fury. "We had just sat down to eat," she said, "when that thing in your place gets up and cries, 'I smell a bit strong, eh? Well I don't eat cake.' Then she tore off her face and ate it. With one bound she disappeared through the window."

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